

10 of 16 DOCUMENTS

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HEADLINE: Conflict over expansion of private Calvert School may be resolved today;
Accord with neighbors key factor as case goes before planning panel

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BODY:

The conflict over Calvert School's expansion appears headed for resolution today as the North Baltimore private school goes before the city planning commission armed with what it badly needs to win design approval: an agreement from the Tuscany-Canterbury Neighborhood Association not to oppose the project.

Robert J. Mathias, a lawyer and newly elected president of Calvert's board of trustees, said yesterday that he hoped the agreement marks the beginning of better relations "in a much more harmonious and cooperative spirit" with the school's neighborhood. "We're delighted," he said.

The 25-year covenant with the community, expected to be signed today, concludes several months of acrimonious discussions between the school and its neighbors - and within the often-divided association. It pins Calvert down on restricting growth and traffic congestion caused by frequent long lines of cars on narrow Tuscany Road. The covenant even extends to a rat abatement program on a construction site.

The school promised not to open an upper school (grades nine to 12) and to limit the student body, now about 360, to 612 pupils, when it adds grades seven and eight by 2003.

Over objections from the association's then-president, Garth Thompson, the group had voted three times to oppose the school's acquisition of a 6-acre property, 4300 N. Charles St., to build two playing fields and add a middle school. Dozens of aggrieved neighbors posted "Stop Calvert!" signs on the lawns of their brick and Tudor-style homes.

Many of the same residents, about 60 in all, approved the agreement after a briefing by the association's vice president and lead negotiator, John C. Marchelya, 31, on Tuesday at First English Lutheran Church.

For the school, it was the second front of peacemaking, having recently reaching a compensation deal with apartment dwellers at 4300 N. Charles St.

Characterizing the agreement as "making the best of a bad situation," Marchelya stressed the Tuscany-Canterbury association does not support the school's expansion; it merely agrees not to oppose it.

Earlier this week, Marchelya said the school agreed to limit acquisitions of properties to the Castalia mansion, a

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gray stone home shaded by a grove of trees in the 200 block of Tuscany Road. He said the neighborhood conceded that the school may move to purchase the privately owned mansion as a headmaster's house and for school entertaining.

Castalia was built in the 1920s by the school's first headmaster, Virgil Hillyer, as his home. It was designed by Laurence Hall Fowler, the architect who designed the Calvert School building in the shape of an E - for "education" - in 1924. The school's lawyer and negotiator, Michael H. Davis, said Calvert will seek the neighborhood's consent for any acquisitions beyond the mansion.

Neighbors were pleased Calvert agreed to create a transportation coordinator to work on car-pool and bus-program logistics. Calvert surveyed its parents and found, as Davis said, "some interest" in busing students to school, as it once did. "Frankly, it could be a marketing tool," Davis said.

Under the agreement, Calvert will provide a parking space for every employee on school property and will have its landscape architect consult with a neighborhood committee about design issues. A community liaison also will stay in contact with Head Master Merrill S. Hall III, Marchelya said, to help resolve conflicts.

GRAPHIC: MAP(S), CALVERT SCHOOL, SHIRDELL MCDONALD : SUN STAFF

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